

We claim:

1. A method of conducting a promotional offer, the method comprising steps of:

5 defining the structure of a promotional offer having a plurality of associated parameters, one or more of which are unspecified or can be varied;

targeting one or more of a plurality of customers as recipients of the offer; and

10 distributing a record of the offer to the customers;

wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable parameters associated with the offer are individually assigned for one or more of the targeted customers to whom the record of the offer is distributed.

15 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the unspecified or variable parameters are defined:

20 (a) when the offer is presented to respective customers; or

(b) when the offer is accepted by respective customers; or

(c) when the offer is redeemed by respective customers; or

25 (d) when requested by respective customers.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned default values.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the assigned default values can be changed a

predetermined number of times.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the unspecified or variable parameters vary with time.

5

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the unspecified or variable offer parameters can include one or more of: offer discount information, offer validity period, and offer life period.

- 10 7. The method of claim 1, wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned for customers on the basis of respective customer profile information.

- 15 8. The method of claim 7, wherein a plurality of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned by different entities able to access different respective customer profile information.

- 20 9. The method of claim 8, wherein there is provided an incentive for the different entities to appropriately assign the unspecified or variable offer parameters.

20

10. The method of claim 8, wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned within a predetermined range of values.

- 25 11. The method of claim 8, wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned in accordance with predetermined rules.

25

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the predetermined rules vary for different respective customers.

- 30 13. The method of claim 11, wherein the predetermined rules specify how to determine a respective customer's eligibility to redeem the offer.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the predetermined rules specify how to determine a respective customer's authorization to determine said one or more unspecified or variable parameters.
- 5 15. The method of claim 7, wherein the customer profile information can include demographic or behavioural information.
16. The method of claim 1, wherein respective customers can decline to redeem the offer.
- 10 17. The method of claim 1, wherein the record of the offer is an electronic coupon.
18. The method of claim 17, wherein the record of the promotional offer is distributed online.
- 15 19. The method of claim 6, wherein the unspecified or variable parameter of offer discount information is determined for each customer such that the customer's utility for the promoted product of the product identifier information exceeds that of the customer's corresponding preferred brand product.
- 20 20. The method of claim 6, wherein the unspecified or variable parameter of offer discount information is determined for each customer as the difference in price between the promoted product of the product identifier information and the customer's corresponding preferred brand product.
- 25 21. The method of claim 6, wherein the unspecified or variable parameter of offer validity period is determined for each customer as at least the period to the estimated time of the customer's next purchase.
- 30 22. A method of conducting a promotional offer, the method comprising:

defining the structure of a promotional offer to be made to a plurality of

customers, the offer having a plurality of associated parameters, one or more of which are unspecified or can be varied;

5 wherein the unspecified or variable parameters are able to be individually assigned for one or more customers to whom a record of the offer is to be distributed.

23. A method of conducting a promotional offer, the method comprising:

10 distributing to one or more targeted customers a record of a promotional offer having a plurality of associated parameters; and

15 defining the values of one or more of the associated parameters for respective targeted customers, when requested by the respective customers;

15 wherein one or more of the parameters associated with the promotional offer are individually assigned to one or more of the targeted customers.

20 24. A method of conducting a promotional offer, the method comprising:

20 targeting one or more of a plurality of customers as recipients of a promotional offer having a plurality of associated parameters, one or more of which are unspecified or can be varied;

25 wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable parameters associated with the offer are individually assigned for one or more targeted customers to whom a record of the offer is to be distributed.

30 25. A method of conducting a promotional offer, the method comprising:

30 distributing to one or more targeted customers a record of a promotional offer having a plurality of associated parameters;

wherein one or more of the parameters associated with the promotional offer have been individually assigned to one or more of the targeted customers.

- 5 26. A computer program product having a computer readable medium having a computer program recorded therein for deciding how to classify a sample in one of a number of predetermined classes, said computer program comprising:

10 code means for defining the structure of a promotional offer having a plurality of associated parameters, one or more of which are unspecified or can be varied;

15 code means for targeting one or more of a plurality of customers as recipients of the offer; and

 code means for distributing a record of the offer to the customers;

20 wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable parameters associated with the offer are individually assigned for one or more of the targeted customers to whom the record of the offer is distributed.

27. Apparatus for conducting a promotional offer, the apparatus comprising:

25 means for defining the structure of a promotional offer having a plurality of associated parameters, one or more of which are unspecified or can be varied;

 means for targeting one or more of a plurality of customers as recipients of the offer; and

30 means for distributing a record of the offer to the customers;

wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable parameters associated with the offer are individually assigned for one or more of the targeted customers to whom the record of the offer is distributed.

5 28. The apparatus of claim 27, wherein the unspecified or variable parameters are defined:

(a) when the offer is presented to respective customers; or

10 (b) when the offer is accepted by respective customers; or

(c) when the offer is redeemed by respective customers; or

15 (d) when requested by respective customers.

29. The apparatus of claim 27, wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned default values.

20 30. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the assigned default values can be changed a predetermined number of times.

31. The apparatus of claim 27, wherein the unspecified or variable parameters vary with time.

25 32. The apparatus of claim 27, wherein the unspecified or variable offer parameters can include one or more of: offer discount information, after validity period and offer life period.

30 33. The apparatus of claim 27, wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned for customers on the basis of respective customer profile information.

34. The apparatus of claim 33, wherein a plurality of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned by different entities able to access different respective customer profile information.
- 5 35. The method of claim 34, wherein there is provided an incentive for the different entities to appropriately assign the unspecified or variable offer parameters.
36. The apparatus of claim 34, wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned within a predetermined range of values.
- 10 37. The apparatus of claim 36, wherein one or more of the unspecified or variable offer parameters are assigned in accordance with predetermined rules.
38. The apparatus of claim 37, wherein the predetermined rules vary for different respective customers.
- 15 39. The apparatus of claim 37, wherein the predetermined rules specify how to determine a respective customer's eligibility to redeem the offer.
- 20 40. The apparatus of claim 37, wherein the predetermined rules specify how to determine a respective customer's authorization to determine said one or more unspecified or variable parameters.
41. The apparatus of claim 33, wherein the customer profile information can include demographic or behavioural information.
- 25 42. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein respective customers can decline to redeem the offer.
- 30 43. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the record of the offer is an electronic coupon.

44. The apparatus of claim 43, wherein the record of the promotional offer is distributed online.
- 5 45. The apparatus of claim 32, wherein the unspecified or variable parameter of offer discount information is determined for each customer such that the customer's utility for the promoted product of the product identifier information exceeds that of the customer's corresponding preferred brand product.
- 10 46. The apparatus of claim 32, wherein the unspecified or variable parameter of offer discount information is determined for each customer as the difference in price between the promoted product of the product identifier information and the customer's corresponding preferred brand product.
- 15 47. The apparatus of claim 32, wherein the unspecified or variable parameter of offer validity period is determined for each customer as at least the period to the estimated time of the customer's next purchase.